Course of Study: English 8 **Grade Level: 8**
Instructional Block/Theme: Block 3 of English Language Arts 8
Exploring the World through Reading Historic Fiction and Nonfiction

International Education: Post-Unification Germany: An excerpt from Jana Hensel's memoir <u>After the Wall:</u> <u>Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life That Came Next</u>

Approximately 90 minutes will be required to complete the reading and related activities.

I. Content:

I want my students to be able to:

A. Understand and appreciate the genre of memoir
B. Identify the main idea of a nonfiction selection
C. Recognize unity and coherence in a nonfiction selection
D. Analyze how a memoir reflects the heritage, traditions, attitudes, and beliefs of its author

II. Prerequisites:

In order to fully appreciate this lesson, the student should be familiar with:

A. Events following WWII and the division of East and West Germany **(Teacher Handout #2)**
B. A map of divided post-WWII Germany **(Teacher Handout #3)**

III. Instructional Objectives:

The student will

A. Understand that memoir is a specific kind of autobiography
B. Read actively and identify important details that point to the main idea of the selection **(Teacher Handout #1)**
C. Identify the main idea
D. Define unity and coherence in the text
E. Recognize details that reflect the author's heritage, traditions, attitudes and beliefs
F. Appreciate the historical and cultural relevance of Jana Hensel's memoir **(Teacher Handout #4)**

IV. Materials and Equipment

Teacher: **Teacher Handout #1**: An excerpt from Jana Hensel's <u>After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next</u>, "That Warm Fuzzy Feeling of Togetherness: On Growing Up in the GDR"

Teacher Handout #2: Timeline of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Jana Hensel's life, A Note from the Translator, including A Brief History of East Germany, Jana

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Hensel and Her Generation, Searching for the Past, and The Politics of Memory
Teacher Handout #3: A map of post-WW II divided Germany (Optional: overhead projector and transparency of **Teacher Handout #3**)
Teacher Handout #4: Book Reviews and Related Articles

Students: **Teacher Handout #1**: An excerpt from Jana Hensel's <u>After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next</u>,"That Warm Fuzzy Feeling of Togetherness: On Growing Up in the GDR"
A Reader's Journal (notebook) in which students record their written reflections and responses to literature

V. Instructional Procedure:

This lesson is designed to be part of a "Post-unification Germany" unit of study. Prior to this lesson, teachers should give students an overview of the events following WWII, the division between East and West Germany and the ultimate fall of the Wall. **(Teacher Handouts #2, #3, and #4)**

A. Understand that a memoir is a specific type of autobiographical writing. Like autobiography, a memoir is about the author's personal experiences. However, a memoir does not necessarily cover the author's entire life.
B. Know that most memoirs have the following characteristics: (1) they are told from the first person point of view, using first-person pronouns, such as *I, me,* and *we,* (2) they are accounts of actual events from the writer's life, (3) they include the writer's feelings and beliefs about his or her family and community.
C. The main idea is the most important point or message that the writer wants to communicate to the reader. In some cases the main idea is only implied by the details the writer provides. Read actively and identify important details that point to the main idea of Hensel's memoir. As you read, jot down important details that offer clues to the main idea of the selection in your Reader's Journal.
D. Look over the details that you listed. What do these details tell you about Jana Hensel and her experience? What main idea is Hensel trying to communicate?

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E. In this memoir, the main idea is closely related to the central conflict between Hensel's desire to re-connect with her GDR childhood and the fact the GDR system has disappeared. Appreciate unity and coherence in the memoir. All the paragraphs in the selection support the main idea with a quality of oneness.

F. In a memoir the writer's heritage, traditions, attitude, and beliefs are often reflected in his or her writing.

Paired Activity: Working with a partner, go back through the selection and find examples that reveal Hensel's attitudes toward herself and her heritage, traditions, and belief system. When you have finished, discuss how Hensel's perceptions of herself and her GDR childhood have changed.

G. Write an entry in your Reader's Journal in response to Jana Hensel's memoir. Consider these questions: How does Jana feel about her childhood? In what ways has her past experience defined who she is? Think of your own past experiences--joys and sorrows, accomplishments and failures, family traditions and values—events that have taught you a valuable lesson or shaped the person you are. What are your most memoir-worthy experiences?

VI. Assessment/Evaluation:

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to recognize the characteristics of a memoir in further readings. Students should be able to use this understanding to reflect on their own lives and uncover memories that matter to them, events that define the person they are becoming.

VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:

Standard 2:	Comprehension/Interpretation
Goal 2.1:	**Acquire Strategies and Skills for Comprehending Text**
8.LA.2.1.1	Determine the relationships among facts, ideas, and events used in various texts to support a central purpose.
8.LA.2.1.3	Make inferences, draw conclusions, and form opinions based on information gathered from text and cite evidence to support
Goal 2.2:	**Acquire Skills to Comprehend Expository Text**
8.LA.2.2.1	Evaluate expository text structure to extend comprehension.

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8.LA.2.2.3	Apply central ideas (literal or inferential) and critical details to summarize information from expository text.
Standard 4:	Writing Application
Goal 4.4:	**Acquire Skills for Literary Response**
8.LA.4.4.1	Write responses to literature that demonstrate an awareness of an author's style.

AFTER THE WALL Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next

1. That Warm Fuzzy Feeling of Togetherness: On Growing Up in the GDR

My childhood ended one evening when I was thirteen years and three months old. It was already dark when Mom and I left the house. Dark and cold. We could see our breath in front of our faces. I had been told to put on tights, boots, and two sweaters underneath my blue thermal anorak, but no one told me where we were going. We crossed over the railroad tracks to get to the tram stop to downtown Leipzig. We didn't see a single soul. At least, I don't think we did. Now, when I look back, I can't honestly remember whether the streets were really deserted or whether I just imagine them that way. And I can't say for sure that I appreciated the beauty of the rain, just barely visible in the yellow-gray glow of the streetlights.

Back then, you had to open tram doors by hand, and they didn't shut tight. An ice-cold draft would blow in through the cracks, while you burned your butt on the overheated leather seats. That night, the passengers in the streetcar were all bundled up in heavy outdoor clothing. A few women wore those fashionable earmuffs that had just recently appeared in the shops. Others wore legwarmers that they had knitted by hand. I thought it was weird that no one was carrying a handbag.

After several stops, the driver opened the doors of the first car and told us the tram was being terminated. We'd have to walk the rest of the way. We all got out and headed off, without a word, in the same direction as if there were only one possible destination that evening.

As we arrived in the center of town, I saw crowds of people forcing their way toward St. Nicolas Church and Karl Marx Square. There were masses of people lined up to march along the ring road. Some carried banners and signs. I can't be sure any more what I saw with my own eyes and what I now remember from the endless newscasts that followed. But I'm certain—probably because I never discussed them with anyone—that a few of my recollections are personal. I remember walking beside a university student and wanting to hold his hand. And I remember the armed men in uniform standing on the side of the road watching us; I wanted to ask them why they didn't come join us. After all, there were a lot more of us than there were of them.

Instead I just kept walking, like a good girl, between my mother and the student. For the first time in my life, I realized that something big was happening—something I didn't understand. Even the grown-ups seemed confused. What would all this lead to? If the student had told me that this was just the beginning, that with each successive Monday more and more people would take to the streets, that the walls would fall and the German Democratic Republic—Communist East Germany—would soon disappear without a trace, taking everything we had known with it, I would have given him a funny look and thought: Fat chance. The GDR couldn't disappear. Not in a million years.

There was no way for me to know that fall of I989 that I was living the last days of my childhood. Now, when I look back on those years before the Wall fell and the whole world changed around us, it seems like a far-away, fairy-tale time. It's a remote past with different hairstyles, different smells, and a different pace of life. It's not easy for people my age—the last generation of GDR kids—to remember the old days, because back then we wanted nothing more than for them to hurry up and end—as though there would be no pain whatsoever involved in losing everything we knew. At some point the tram doors shut properly, and the old days were suddenly gone.

Now, a decade and a half later, the first half of our lives seems very remote. Even when we try, we can't remember much. Nothing remains of our childhood country—which is of course exactly what everyone wanted—and now that we're grown up and it's almost too late, I suddenly miss all the lost memories. I've grown afraid that, by always looking forward and never glancing back, we no longer have any idea where we stand. I'd like to retrace where we come from, to rediscover lost memories and forgotten experiences. I only worry whether I'll be able to find my way back.

Shortly after the Wall fell in November I989, the pictures of Lenin and former GDR Head of State and Party Erich Honecker disappeared from our classrooms. It was all we could talk about for a while. Day in and day out, these two men had been as much a part of our visual lives as the test pattern that appeared on television at the end of the broadcast day, but we only really noticed them after they were gone.

A bit later, the old system of buying milk collectively—paying a month in advance and having it delivered to your home was discontinued. Presumably, the change was made to avoid scaring off new customers in a free market economy, but I don't remember exactly when it happened. What I do remember was that moment of rebellion years before—it must have been in the second or third grade—when, behind the teacher's back, I tore open the slippery and always somewhat smelly plastic milk package with my teeth and drank straight from the hole. That was cool. The others were still drinking their milk through straws like kindergartners.

At some other point in late '89 or early '90— here, too, I can't remember exactly when—we stopped going to all those state-run extracurricular events Saturdays had previously been reserved for community activities, but now most of us preferred to drive across the border to West Germany with our parents to pick up our Begrussungsgeld—the IOO deutschmarks in "welcome money" handed out by the West German government to East German visitors. Our teachers soon decided to do the same. Saturday activities were never officially discontinued; they simply disappeared on their own. The same thing happened to Tuesday afternoons. No one was interested in dance fitness groups, the Young Historians Society, the chess club, or art classes anymore. And Wednesdays changed, too. As a preteen in the GDR, I used to put on my red scarf and pointy cap every Wednesday afternoon at 4 P.M., and head off to meetings of the Junge Pioniere (Young Pioneers), our version of the Scouts, but with a heavy Socialist slant. Likewise,

the older kids used to attend gatherings of the Freie Deutsche Jugend, or Free German Youth.

One by one, we stopped all the activities through which our Socialist pedagogues had hoped to mold our personalities and to prepare us for future careers as engineers, cosmonauts, teachers, or transportation workers. Contact lapsed between us and the industrial managers who had served as our state-sponsored godfathers and who were responsible for initiating us into the mysteries of Socialist production. The milk-money collector disappeared, as did the group committee director, his deputy, and the leader of the Young Pioneers.

Seemingly overnight, the endless appointments that had filled our childhood were cancelled. We used to arrive at school to find that a short excursion, a fire alarm, or a flag saluting exercise had been scheduled before first period. No more. The compulsory medical examinations were discontinued, and no one accompanied us—for reasons of "class solidarity," as our teachers had always said— down to the school basement, where the dentist had set up a makeshift office. That was all right with me. I was just as happy not to have to wait on the long, hard sports benches and listen to the dentist drilling in the next room, or to sprint back up the stairs holding my nose so as not to gag on the smell of antiseptics.

Gone, too, were the Spartacus Track and Field Competitions. No one came to tell us where to set up the heavy black loudspeakers, which would kick off the big event by blaring the Olympic anthem. It was the end of a childhood ritual. Track meets were huge in the GDR. They always started around 7 A.M., before the sun had even come up. We would stand around the freezing sports fields, anxiously awaiting our chance to qualify for the district championships in the triple jump or the sixty-meter dash. I would press the thermos of hot tea clipped to my belt against my belly and imagine the voice of Heinz Florian Oertel, East Germany's leading sports announcer, relating my triumphs. Others would slap their biceps, as they had seen our national cyclists do on television during the last Goodwill Games with the West.

Competitive sports were out. No one went to after-school practice any more. We'd always been irritated that sports had clashed with the ever-exciting Little House on the Prairie or the I950S Western series Fury. (Everyone in the GDR watched Western TV shows, which could be picked up by fiddling with the TV antennas. We just had to do it secretively, and we were careful never to mention our favorite shows in front of our teachers.) Kids used to get back home at 6 P.M., exhausted and sore, chug a bottle of milk in front of the refrigerator, and then quickly do homework. Now we rushed home as soon as school was over and parked ourselves in front of the TV. Our mothers initially welcomed this development. At long last, there'd be time to watch Medicine by Numbers, Monika the Jockey, Suburban Hospital and other GDR shows as a family. The only problem was that, by the time we stopped going to after-school sports in I990, those shows had all been cancelled.

Teacher Handout 1

The ABC magazines for young readers gradually disappeared from our school, taking with them Manne Murmelauge, the friendly little freckle-faced mascot with the scarf and cap from page three, who gave us tips on how to better organize our charity fund-raising brigades, or how to improve the quality of our special edition of the school newspaper celebrating the signing of the Warsaw Pact. No longer did Manne explain the meaning of the three points of the Young Pioneer neck scarf or urge us to recycle old newspapers and hold bake sales in our school lobby to raise funds for Nelson Mandela and the Sandinistas. Bake sales, according to Manne in the old days, were best staged in front of the principal's office and the door leading to the school playground, where the flags of the GDR, the Young Pioneers, the Free German Youth, and the Soviet Union would be clearly visible. If we won the competition between schools for the most money raised, Manne had always promised, we'd win a pennant, and Mandela would get to leave jail.

Frankly, I could see the advantage in not having Manne around any more telling us what to do. I'd always been an enthusiastic collector of old newspapers: the SERO recycling company had paid a couple of cents per kilo, and it had been one of the few ways to earn a bit of extra pocket money. But in a free market economy, you had to collect two to three times as much paper before they'd buy it, and competition for territory was fierce. If we had rung a doorbell and announced "Hello, we're from the Young Pioneers, and we're collecting old bottles and newspapers" on a street that belonged to the seventh-grade kids, there would have been trouble. When we went around collecting old paper, we'd post the toughest-looking kid in front of the house to guard our push-cart. If the seventh graders caught us on their turf, then that kid was left to defend our recyclables, while the rest of us scattered.

Walks through the woods were more dangerous after I989. I no longer had Korbine Fruchtchen, the mascot of the FROSI Let s Be Joyful and Sing" Society, at my side to tell me which berries were okay to eat and which weren't. She used to explain that the forestry industry depended on me to collect chestnuts and acorns, and to plant medicinal herbs in the school garden to increase its annual production. But our interests had moved on anyway: We now collected the free toy surprises that came with McDonald's Happy Meals. We no longer spent our Sunday afternoons making acorn figures or decorating our bicycle spokes with beer coasters. We now sat inside hunched over a game of Monopoly or absorbed in a Mickey Mouse comic book.

Today, when I look at old GDR photos of myself, I see a sulky kid with an old leather military pouch slung haphazardly over her shoulders and a white nurse's bonnet with a Red Cross insignia on her head, her hands tightly gripping the handlebars of a green push-bike. In those pictures, I'm always staring directly into the camera. If I didn't know better, I'd say I looked a bit like an operative in some child police commando. That was one of the by-products of an ideological education—children learned that they were supposed to be useful and do their duty toward the state. As kids, we were always pretending to be soldiers, nurses, cops, doctors—any responsible job where you got to wear a uniform.

Teacher Handout 1

These pictures were taken more than fifteen years ago. In the meantime, everything has changed. The Wall came down, the GDR was swallowed up by the West, and my childhood disappeared. Sometimes I feel as if my past has been locked away in a museum with no name and no address, and no one seems very interested in going inside to have a look to see what's there. Occasionally I walk around its dingy rooms. When I do, I stumble across old friends like Manne Murmelauge. I'm happy to see him, but I can tell that he resents me for turning my back on him without so much as a goodbye. Indeed, the harder I press my nose to his glass case, the more he seems to withdraw from view.

As soon as the Wall fell, the language changed. The consumer depot was suddenly called a "supermarket," nickies became "T-shirts," and apprentices turned into "trainees." Counters were called "terminals," the Polylux machine became an "overhead projector," and date books had morphed into "Filofaxes." One morning, after the local polyclinic had gotten a fresh coat of paint, the sign over the door suddenly read "Doctors' Offices." And mondos were now known as "condoms"—but that didn't concern us at our age. Not yet.

I no longer went to the Pioneer House but to the rec center, where the Pioneer Leaders were now called "supervisors." Before, our activities were organized into so-called working groups; now everybody just joined "clubs."

In stores you could buy everything that was advertised on TV. Everywhere on the streets, con men were trying to get suckers to bet money on shell games. Ex-classmates who'd fled the GDR before the fall of the Wall—who'd "absconded," as people used to say—now reappeared in our schoolyards, as if they'd never been away. Their accents were different, though, and they looked if they'd just stepped straight out of *Medi&Zini* or one of those other West German kids' TV shows.

We were no longer allowed to call people "Fidschis"; we were told to say "foreigners" or "asylum seekers"; that sounded funny, because many of those people had been born in East Germany and had never been out of the country. We didn't have a special nickname for people from Cuba or Mozambique either, before or after the Wall. And now we didn't need one; after the Wall, they all suddenly disappeared. The same was true for the convicts who used to man the SERO recycling centers, sorting the bottles by color and making sure that none of us climbed through a hole in the fence and broke into the metal container where the Western newspapers were kept, waiting to be re-used for the good of the Socialist community. One day, they too were gone.

I quickly purged my vocabulary of words like "Assis" or "antisocials," which was how we described criminals or people who refused to work. In school, we used to tutor their children, seeing to it that they learned to read and write and that no one picked on them too much. If they played hooky, it was our responsibility to go to their homes and find them. But after the Wall, both the "antisocials" and their kids also disappeared.

With the Olsen family it was different. The Olsens were a band of rather simpleminded Danes, who were the stars of our Sunday morning children's movie matinees. Generations of Socialist kids had laughed at the Olsens' numbskull adventures, mistakenly believing that the presence of Danish films on our screens meant that the world outside the Warsaw Pact hadn't completely forgotten we existed. After the Wall, you could still sometimes catch an old Olsens' film on TV, but it broke my heart to learn that we were the only ones who had ever tuned in. No one in West Germany had even heard of Egon, Benny, and Kjeld. By contrast everyone knew Karel Gott, the "Golden Voice of Prague," whose schmaltzy easy-listening records were a fixture of the state-run East German label Amiga. That was devastating. We always thought Gott had learned German especially for us.

Today, I can't help feeling a bit jealous when my West German friends go on about how much they love going home for visits with their folks. Even though they would never dream of moving back to Heidelberg or Krefeld, it's nice to have everything just as they remember it. That always makes me imagine walking the streets of my childhood, retracing my route to school and rediscovering past sights and smells. I picture myself surreptitiously lying down between periods on the pile of dusty mattresses in the far corner of our school gym and pressing my nose against the heavy medicine ball. I look over at the long wooden benches, run my hand over their surfaces, and remember being afraid of getting splinters when we slid across them on our bellies, churning our arms as if swimming.

To tell the truth, though, I preferred Volkerball, a Socialist variation of dodgeball. There would always be one star who rose to glory when most of his teammates were "out" and the uncoordinated or fat kids who couldn't care less which team won had already headed for the changing rooms. That was too bad for them. They never got to witness how a single star player can completely turn around a game of Volkerball. Those of us who stuck around until the end always admired the star. Later, during classes, I would turn round and watch him out of the corner of my eye, basking in his reflected glow.

Yesterday's dodge-ball heroes are gone, and since our childhood has been locked up in that nameless museum, there are no words left to describe them adequately. And because the museum also has no address, I don't even know where to go to find them.

We'll never be part of a youth movement, I thought. It was I998 and I was spending a year abroad as a university student. I was crowded together with friends from Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and Austria in a tiny dorm room in Marseilles. The Italians had cooked dinner. There were no stools, and people knelt, sat on the bed, squatted on the floor, or simply leaned on the doorframe. After several bottles of wine and enough cigarettes to overflow every ashtray, the mood turned euphoric. Everyone began to jabber at once. The names of childhood heroes ricocheted like balls off the walls. My friends invoked their favorite Smurfs and discussed the genealogical complexities of Smurf Village. Favorite movies were cited, favorites books compared,

and heated debates broke out over *The Lord of the Rings* and *Pippi Longstocking*, Donald Duck and Lucky Luke, Asterix and Obelix.

All I had to contribute were Alfons Zitterbacke, well-behaved Ottokar, the Wizard of Sapphire City, and a host of other obscure characters from East German children's books and TV programs. Nobody knew them in the West, of course, but I, too, wanted to share something of my childhood heroes. I tried to explain. The others looked at me with vague interest, but the euphoria was gone. Suddenly I felt sick and tired of being different than everyone else. I just wanted to tell childhood stories--like the Italians, French, and Austrians did—without having to explain, without having to translate my memories into words that had not been part of my experience and that scattered my recollections even more so with each attempt at clarification. I didn't want to spoil the party and their warm, fuzzy feeling of togetherness, so I just kept my mouth shut. Instead I asked myself: What was I ever going to make of my childhood? Like an old summer dress, it had gone out of fashion. It wasn't even good enough for a bit of party chit-chat. I took a sip of wine and decided it was time to go. Time for a trip. A trip back to where I came from.

Teacher Handout 2

Timeline of the GDR and Jana Hensel's Life

May 1945 WWII ends. The Soviet Army captures Berlin and accepts Germany's surrender. The city is divided into four separate zones controlled by Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

June 1948-May1949 As tensions rise between the new superpowers, the Soviet forces blockade West Berlin, trapping its inhabitants with little food or fuel. West Berlin is an island inside Communist controlled East Germany, and the Allies keep the city alive with a continuous airlift of supplies.

May 23, 1949 The Federal Republic of Germany—West Germany—is founded.

October 7, 1949 The German Democratic Republic (GDR)—East Germany—is founded.

1952 East Germany closes its borders with West Germany. Only the border between East and West Berlin remains.

June 1953 Mass-uprising of East Berlin building workers against the Communist government. The revolt is crushed with the help of the Soviet Army. At least forty people are killed.

August 11, 1961 Berliners hear rumors of the Soviet Union closing the border. More than 4,000 East Germans flee to West Berlin.

August 12-13 1961 East German troops seal Berlin's borders and begin building the Wall on the night of August I2. The Wall begins as a barbed wire barrier and gradually grows into an elaborate series of walls and fences, fortified with automatically triggered weapons and patrolled by heavily armed guards with dogs, all designed to stop East Germans from leaving. In the years that follow, more than ~oo people are killed trying to cross the Wall.

August 26,1961 All crossing points are closed to West Berlin citizens.

June 26, 1963 President Kennedy visits the Wall. He pronounces himself a "Berliner" and pledges to defend the residents of West Berlin.

May 1973 East Germany and West Germany establish formal diplomatic ties.

1976 Jana Hensel is born in the GDR.

1983-1990 Jana Hensel attends grade school in Leipzig.

June 12,1987 President Reagan visits Berlin and urges Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Wall.

Teacher Handout 2

May-September 1989 Hungary opens its borders with Austria, allowing East Germans to begin leaving the Eastern Bloc. East Germans begin taking refuge in West German embassies in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.

September 10, 1989 Hungarian government stops enforcing East German visa restrictions, opening its borders. In the first three days, 15,000 East German refugees pass through en route to West Germany, where they receive asylum.

September-October 1989 In the face of weekly pro-democracy demonstrations that begin in the city of Leipzig, Communist leader Erich Honecker is forced to resign as head of state and is replaced by professed reformist Egon Krenz.

November 4, 1989 An anti-Communist protest in East Berlin draws more than one million people demanding democracy. Three days later, the East German government resigns.

November 9, 1989 The Berlin Wall is opened, and travel restrictions are lifted. Mass celebrations follow.

December 1989 Chancellor Helmut Kohl begins Round Table talks with new East German leader, Hans Modrow.

February 1990 The Soviet Union, Britain, France, and the United States approve reunification.

March 18, 1990 In free elections, East Germans overwhelmingly approve reunification and Western-style political and economic systems. A formal treaty is signed in May.

October 3, 1990 Germany is formally reunited.

1991-1995 Jana Hensel attends high school in Leipzig as part of the first East German class to use a Western syllabus.

1998-1999 Jana spends a year in Marseilles.

1999 Jana moves to Berlin.

2002 Jana moves to Paris for one year, then back to Berlin. She begins to write *After the Wall.*

2002 *After the Wall* is published in Germany as *Zonenkinder*. Book debuts on the bestseller list and stays there from September 2002 until March 2004, including ten months in the top ten. *Zonenkinder* is reprinted fourteen times. More than 180,000 copies are sold in Germany.

2004 Paperback edition of *Zonenkinder* is published in Germany and becomes an immediate bestseller. Companion volume of essays on "the book that changed Germany" is published under the title Zonenkinderund Wir ("*Zonenkinder and Us*")

A Note from the Translator

When it was published in 2002, Jana Hensel's After the Wall—originally titled *Zonenkinder* in German—became an almost instant best seller. It was a sensation—the first book to explore the trials and tribulations of a generation of East Germans that spent its childhood in the GDR and its adolescence and adulthood in the reunited Federal Republic. Many books about the difficulty of negotiating the East-West divide have followed, but Hensel's stands as the first to define a cultural phenomenon—the alienation and loss felt by the last generation of East German youth after the fall of the Wall. For the American reader, some of the historical and cultural references in After the Wall may be confusing, so we offer this brief recap of modern Germany and of the main themes in Hensel's story.

A Brief History of East Germany

The GDR was formed in I949 from the Soviet occupation zone of the former Third Reich. At the same time, the British, American, and French zones in the West joined to form the Federal Republic. East Germany was essentially a one-party state, ruled by the SED or Socialist Unity Party bureaucracy with a despotic state and party leader—Walter Ulbricht (I949—7I) and Erich Honecker (I97I—I989)—at its head.

Despite its name, the GDR wasn't democratic. Political power was monopolized by the party apparatus, the economy was centralized and state-run in line with Marxist-Leninist ideology, and all major decisions and developments had to meet with the approval of the Politburo in Moscow. Although a great number of its citizens initially embraced the "Socialist experiment," discontent with the government's heavy-handed rule grew quickly. On June I7, I953, the East German army and Soviet tanks had to be called in to put down a nationwide strike against increases in production quotas and other government policies, making a lie of the GDR propaganda about building a state by and for the working masses.

The GDR owed its existence to the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Although East Germans had the highest standard of living in the Eastern bloc, and while they did develop a sense of national identity, both positive and negative, the GDR was perennially overshadowed by the more affluent capitalist Federal Republic. By the late I950s, increasing numbers of its citizens "voted with their feet," i.e., absconded to West Germany, where they were treated as a special class of refugees: fellow citizens who had escaped from a repressive illegitimate regime occupying German soil. By I96I, the problem of people fleeing had reached such proportions that it threatened the very existence of the GDR, and the SED took the extraordinary step of sealing off its borders

to the West with fortifications and armed guards to prevent its own citizens from escaping. The Berlin Wall became the particularly ugly face of Communist coercion.

With the divide between East and West literally set in concrete, Germans as a whole had no choice but to accept the status quo as a kind of fate. In I969, the GDR and the Federal Republic formally recognized one another, and East Germans by and large adopted a strategy of "inner emigration," whereby they toed the party line in public in return for being allowed a measure of freedom in their private lives. They may not have liked the system, but they got used to the idea of a paternalistic state bureaucracy that provided for their basic needs and organized their daily lives, as it restricted their ambitions and horizons.

Nonetheless, the potential for rebellion didn't disappear. In I989, in the wake of reformist Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika or "openness," a protest movement began to build that saw tens of thousands of antigovernment demonstrators take the streets in cities like Leipzig for what became known as the Monday Rallies. With the Soviets refusing to quash popular discontent by force, the SED was forced to depose Honecker and remove the unpopular restrictions on travel.

The opening of the borders in November I989— or the Fall of the Wall, as it is often known—spelled the end of the GDR. A year later, after negotiations handled by an interim GDR leadership; the West German government, under Chancellor Helmut Kohl; and the four occupying powers from World War II, East Germans voted to accede to the Federal Republic. The Cold War was over; the GDR, at the age of forty-one, was laid to rest.

What remained of East Germany was a collective identity and culture. Kohl campaigned intensively for "reunification" in I990, with the visions that the GDR would "blossom with prosperity" if its citizens voted to join and submit to the West German system. The majority of East Germans believed those promises. What they failed to realize was that the mentality acquired under more than four decades of Socialism would often leave them ill-equipped to deal with the everyday demands of a free-market, competitive society. Meanwhile the Federal Republic's boom years were over, and attempts to impose Western German practices and thinking—for instance, by closing factories deemed unproductive--have just as often done more harm than good.
Fifteen years after reunification, Germany is still a country of two halves.
Unemployment in the former GDR remains at more than twenty percent, twice as high as in the rest of Germany. Many young people leave to seek their fortunes elsewhere, while the middle-aged jobless who are too old to be retrained—sink into catatonic resignation, asking themselves what went wrong. The GDR is history. East Germany—as a geographical area, a way of life, and a mentality survives to this day.

Jana Hensel and Her Generation

There have been countless books exploring the trials and tribulations of former GDR citizens, who were forced as adults to adapt to life in the Federal Republic. Much has also written about the so-called children of reunification, i.e., today's post-Cold-War

German kids. After the Wall is the first major book to tackle the generation in between, those who spent their brief childhoods in the GDR and the rest of their lives in the Federal Republic. Jana Hensel was born in I976 in Leipzig, the flashpoint for the Monday Rallies in I989, and the city that, more than any other, has come to symbolize East German popular rebellion against the GDR. From I983-90 Hensel attended grade school—the curriculum was set by the SED. In I99I, she progressed to a university-preparation track in high school, where her graduating class became the first to use textbooks that came from the West. In I995, she began studying French and German literature at Leipzig University. From I998 - 99, Hensel spent a year abroad in Marseilles, transferring to the Humboldt University in Berlin upon her return to Germany. Parallel to her studies, she published an Internet literary magazine and worked as a freelance editor for a major publisher. In 2002, she spent a year in Paris and began work on this book. *After the Wall* became an almost instant best seller when it was published in 2002. Now, at the age of twenty-eight, Hensel is a nationally acclaimed author, who has worked for Germany's most prestigious weekly news magazine, Der Spiegel, and toured abroad everywhere from China to North America. Hers is, by any standards, a success story, the tale of an "immigrants' daughter" who assimilated into the mainstream and made it very big indeed.

The irony--one not lost on Hensel herself—is that her success is intimately connected to her parents' hardships, even their failures. "West Germans can always ask for parental advice when they get in trouble or can't make a decision," Hensel says over a coffee in a trendy cafe in an East Berlin district that has been totally re-made by Western entrepreneurs. "I can't. My parents' experience isn't relevant. They know far less about this society than I do."

Her book is full of reminiscences and anecdotes from daily 1ife that illustrate the distance between East Germans of her age and their mothers and fathers—everything from the awkwardness of exchanging unwanted gifts on holidays to heated political arguments when parents collide with friends from the West. The experiences Hensel describes are common to the second generation after immigration, though the parents she describes never actually moved anywhere. Or as Jana Hensel puts it in conversation

The problem is that my parents are fluent in the language. If they spoke broken German, everyone would understand what they are: refugees from a country that no longer exists, who don't know how to get on in their adopted homeland. And people would also understand that people like me have to negotiate the same situation as the kids of Italian or Korean immigrants to the United States.

The original German title of this book, *Zonenkinder*, translates literally as "children of the zone." The word is a reference to the origins of the GDR in the Soviet occupation zone, a slang expression traditionally used by West Germans to underscore their contempt for the East, and a term ironically appropriated by East Germans to indicate their affiliation with the ex-Socialist community. Hensel also uses it to describe a particular state of mind among people of her generation, a "twilight zone" of sorts, in which daily life seems arbitrary, provisional, and somewhat unreal. Reunification

encouraged East Germans to repress the past. East Germans of her generation have succeeded where their parents often failed, but that has left them feeling ill at ease with what amounts to a black hole in their biographies.

Searching for the Past

Zonenkinder was written, in part, as a response to a ~West German best seller, Florian Illies's *Generation Golf*, and the Western "pop literature" trend of the late I99Os. With its title taken from a Volkswagen ad campaign, *Generation Golf* read like a transcription of an extended cocktail-party reminiscence in the “Hey, remember *Gilligan's Island*"-vein about the cultural detritus of the author's youth. The message, insofar as there was one, was that today's generation of young adults is defined by unquestioning materialism. The book was a massive hit, appealing not only to its target audience but also to older readers curious about how their sons and daughters viewed the world. The only group that was left out were those from the East.

East Germans, Hensel argues, were no less materialistic than their Western peers, and *Zonenkinder* is full of the cultural detritus from her own Socialist childhood. The difference is that the cult products and TV shows of the GDR carry no cultural value for the majority of people in the society where East Germans now live. With considerable self-irony, Hensel describes her disappointment at a college dormitory party in France where the conversation turns to the Smurfs, when she realizes that East German kids' TV shows don't provide any basis for generational bonding.

The feelings of alienation and loss that arise in such moments make *After the Wall* far more interesting than *Generation Golf*. As Hensel describes them, the cartoon mascots of the Socialist Young Pioneers youth group may appear ham-fisted and provincial to readers raised in the West, but it doesn't require a great leap of imagination for us to realize that they leave a gap when they disappear. The artifacts of the mass culture of our youth may be utterly banal, but they do serve to anchor us in place and time--a lesson that applies equally well to East and West and that may inspire Western readers to reflect on the materialism of their own childhoods in a way that goes beyond the mindless celebration of the familiar.

At the same time, Hensel is also writing against the nostalgic longing for the GDR, a phenomenon known in German as *Ostalgie*. Although it abounds with comic, often affectionate portrayals of the past, *After the Wall* doesn't whitewash life under a one-party dictatorship. In her descriptions of her parents' frantic efforts to procure the necessary supplies for enjoyable Christmas celebrations, or the visit to her school by a Communist "sports functionary" in search of children he can mold into steroid-infused Olympic gold-medalists, Hensel captures the repressive, sinister side of a society based upon sacrificing the interests of the individual to those of the state. Readers get little sense in these pages that things would be better by turning back the clock to the days when common citizens had to stand in lines at meagerly stocked department stores, and

the State Secret Police or *Stasi* enlisted a virtual army of informers to spy on their neighbors for signs of potential rebellion.

Hensel wants to recover, not reinstate, the past. "I've grown afraid," she writes, "that by always looking forward and never glancing back, we no longer have any idea where we stand." What's at stake in her reminiscences about the minutiae of a GDR childhood is more than just the pleasant warmth of nostalgia. It's the sense of a collective history that gets temporarily disrupted when people are uprooted and past and present become disjoined.

The Politics of Memory

Hensel sets up the book as a journey to the past, but confesses in its initial pages that she isn't sure she will be able to "find my way back." Part of the problem is the omnipresence of the media. Her memories of 1989, as she discovers with dismay, aren't so much recollections of the Monday Rallies themselves as of the television news reports about them. Struck by her obvious difference from her Western peers in Marseilles, Hensel decides to pay a return visit to Leipzig to see the city of her childhood with her own eyes. Her descriptions of what she saw and how she felt re-access a number of genuine recollections obscured by the triumphant media images of the Fall of the Wall.

Memory is a political issue in the new Germany. Many West Germans complain that their Eastern countrymen—a decade and a half after reunification—have yet to get over the "walls in their heads," i.e., put their Socialist past and its attendant mindset behind them. East Germans, on the other hand, find this presumptuous. In a series of satiric anecdotes, Hensel suggests that West Germans' frustration with East Germans' interest in their past is in fact an extension of old Cold-War hostilities and need for control. "I have no desire," writes Hensel, "to tell young men in suits for the umpteenth time that they should stop telling us that East German history is finished, and just let us decide when and if we want to put our past behind us."

There is, however, another set of memories that Hensel first accesses as a student while visiting the summer house of a college friend from the West. There, she is struck by a family photo on the wall of her friend's grandfather wearing an SS uniform. The founding myth of the GDR was one of heroic Socialist resistance to Nazi barbarity. As a result, East Germans had little sense of sharing any sort of collective guilt for the crimes of the Holocaust. In the book's most bitter irony, Hensel realizes that her new "Federal German" identity entails membership in the community of the "grandchildren of the perpetrators." Memory, it turns out, goes further back than she thought.

Hensel's unexpected confrontation with Germany's Nazi legacy is a somber interlude in a that otherwise treats a serious topic without taking itself too seriously—something Germans, and East Germans in particular, are often accused of doing. *After the Wall* is not a dry sociological study aiming toward a comprehensive, fact-based portrait of a demographic group. It is a witty, ironic, self-deprecating personal narrative

that flows freely between the past and the present and focuses on everyday culture: fashion, sports, eating and drinking, and above all social interaction.

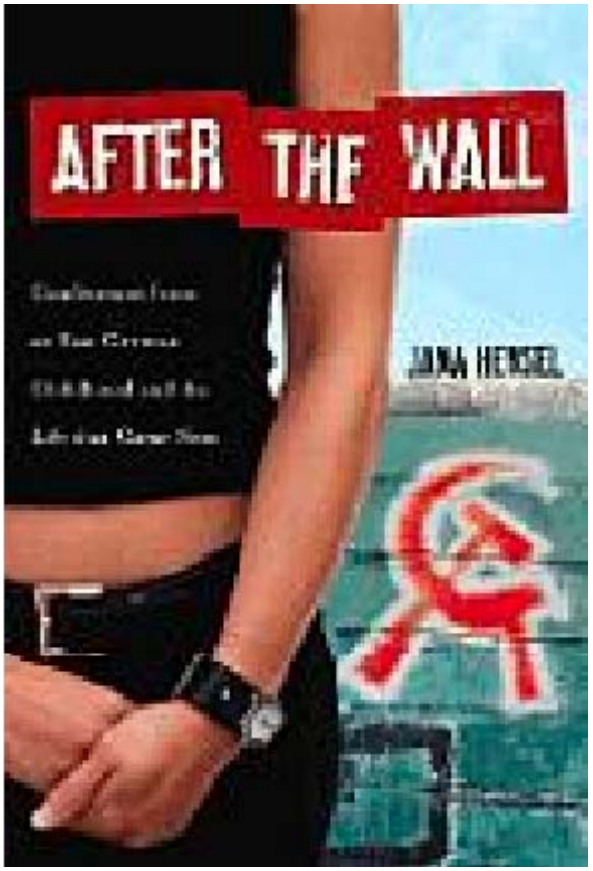
Lacking a clear connection to the society in which they were born but were forced to forget, Hensel concludes that today's East Germans of her generation are united by a search for community as they pursue individual success. Bonding with friends takes the place of ties to the past or the family. "The only constant in our lives," Hensel writes, "is something we ourselves constructed: the feeling of belonging to a generation." Uncomfortable as it may have been at first, the "zone" emerges as not all that bad a place to be.

Teacher Handout 3

Teacher Handout 4

GIIN Dublin - Infozentrum: Jana Hensel
http://www.goethe.de/gr/dub/buch/enib0212.htm

Jana Hensel
After the Wall: Confessions from an East German childhood and the life that came next



In *After the Wall* Jana Hensel reminisces about her brief East German childhood. When the Wall comes down the author is only 13 years old. Although she and her sister accompany their mother to the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig, she is too young to understand the unfolding of the country's political destiny. The day on which the wall finally collapses is remembered by the teenager as "the last day of (her) childhood".

Soon after, the Honecker and Lenin pictures disappear from the classrooms and the nation enters into a phase of conforming to Western German living concepts. Eventually, the Eastern German sports day "Spartakiade" is renamed "Bundesjugendspiele", the former "Pionierhaus" is changed into a "Freizeitzentrum" and the "Pionierleiter" becomes the "Vertrauenslehrer". Things that seemed such an integral part of the East German childhood simply vanished from one day to the other. Left behind is a generation of children that is too young to critically reflect on the SED regime, and too old to unreservedly accept the new system. The subsequent years, which influence the author's generation, are characterised by adapting to the norms of the promising "better" West. By obliterating their history, their vision is set strictly on the life ahead.

After the Wall is divided into eight essays in which the author embarks on a "search for the lost memories and experiences" of her short GDR childhood. In retrospect Hensel recapitulates and combines political events with childhood memories and social and cultural developments of subsequent years. This very specific point of view makes these autobiographical essays a very interesting read. And despite the author's categorical *us-them* perspective, the book succeeds in offering the reader a contemporary glimpse into Germany's recent history.

AK

Jana Hensel
After the Wall

Teacher Handout 4

Public Affairs, New York, 2004
ISBN 1-58648-266-1

http://www.goethe.de/gr/dub/buch/enib0212.htm

Links for further information:
Talk amongst young authors from the former GDR in *Die Welt*
http://www.welt.de/daten/2002/11/09/1109lw367197.htx
Articles in TAZ
http://www.taz.de/pt/2002/11/26/a0171.nf/text
NZZ feature
http://www.nzz.ch/2002/09/26/fe/page-article8EKK1.html
Report in *Spiegel*
http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/0,1518,229789,00.html
Homepage Other Titles: Book of the Month

Publisher Comments:

The bittersweet memoir of a young East German woman, searching for her country and herself, fifteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Book jacket…

Jana Hensel was thirteen on November 9, 1989, the night the Berlin wall fell. In all the euphoria over German reunification, no one stopped to think what it would mean for Jana and her generation of East Germans. These were the kids of the seventies, who had grown up in the shadow of Communism with all its hokey comforts: the Young Pioneer youth groups, the cheerful Communist propaganda, and the comforting knowledge hat they lived in a Germany unblemished by an ugly Nazi past and a callous capitalist future.

Suddenly everything was gone. East Germany disappeared, swallowed up by the West, and in its place was everything Jana and her friends had coveted for so long—designer clothes, Hollywood movies, supermarkets, magazines. They snapped up every possible western product and mannerism. They changed the way they talked, the way they walked, what they read, where they went. They moved to Berlin. They cut off from their parents. They took English lessons, and opened bank accounts. Fifteen years later, they all have the right haircuts and drive the right cars, but who are they? Where are they going? And what happened to the world they left behind?

In *After the Wall*, Jana Hensel tells the story of her confused generation of East Germans, who were forced to abandon their past and feel their way through a foreign landscape to an uncertain future. Now as they look back, they wonder whether the oppressive, yet comforting life of their childhood wasn't so bad after all.

Jana Hensel was born in Leipzig, East Germany, in 1976. She studied in Leipzig, Marseille, Berlin, and Paris. She is currently a freelance journalist living in Berlin. *After the Wall*, published in German under the title *Zonenkinder*, was a major bestseller in

Germany. Jefferson Chase has previously translated *The Culture of Defeat* by Wolfgang Schivelbusch and *Death in Venice and Other Stories* by Thomas Mann. A journalist and writer, he lives in Berlin.

Reviews…
Goethe-Institut
Jana Hensel: After the Wall
Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next
Translated by Jefferson Chase
New York: PublicAffairs, 2004
180 pages

"Jana Hensel was 13 years old when the Berlin Wall came down, so she brought less baggage with her from the German Democratic Republic than did members of her parents' generation. Her description of this generational split is one of the strengths of this memoir, finds Nadja Geer of Die Zeit. Whereas the older generation faced unemployment and a displaced sense of self, Hensel and her friends were more than happy to embrace the West with the fall of Communism, rushing to experience Capitalist popular culture. Gone were the days of the Young Pioneers, replaced by Levis, overstocked supermarkets and Hollywood movies. It took roughly half a decade for "ostalgia," the nostalgia for the former East, to set in and Hensel assists uninitiated readers in understanding it by providing a glossary of East German terms. She is joined on this Showcase list by two other "Zonenkinder" (children of the Zone) peers - Jakob Hein and Antje Rávic Strubel. Born in Leipzig in 1976, Jana Hensel studied in Leipzig, Marseille, Berlin, and Paris. In 1999, together with author Thomas Hettche, she began publishing the literary magazine, Edit, and in 2000, the Internet anthology, Null. Today Hensel lives in Berlin as a freelance editor and critic." (© 2005 Goethe-Institut)

> "A fascinating book that demystifies life behind the Berlin Wall with wit, candor and insight. Jana Hensel's generation grew up to watch their entire country—with its Lenin worship, steroid-pumped athletes, Young Pioneer rallies and Milk Troops—disappear just in time for high school. Her account of what happened afterwards skirts the usual nostalgia and finger-pointing to become an entirely mature and convincing memoir of German reunification."
> --Gary Shteyngart, author of *The Russian Debutante's Handbook*

Memoirs
Lives at home and abroad, altered forever by accidental violence or history.
Reviewed by Andrew Ervin
Sunday, February 13, 2005; Page BW13

Out of the East

After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next (Public Affairs, $24) also explicates the effects that political upheaval can have on the individual. A native of the former German Democratic Republic,

Teacher Handout 4

Jana Hensel first published this nostalgic, rose-tinted look at a childhood behind the Iron Curtain under the title Zonenkinder (or "Children of the Zone"). It struck home with enough German readers, similarly ambivalent about reunification, to skyrocket up the bestseller lists. It now appears in English for the first time.

"My Socialist education was difficult to shake," she writes. "Could it really be true that nice people had grown up in a system of capitalist exploitation, empty materialism, and indifference toward world peace and starvation in Africa?" While discussing some of the changes after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Hensel begins one paragraph with "Things really were different when we were kids" and ends it with "In retrospect, I can't help thinking that the old system made more sense." Though she's specifically discussing athletics, the sentiment seems to carry over into other facets of society.

As in most memoirs of childhood, the author yearns for a simpler time of life. What makes Hensel's book different is that every East German child was, it seems, indoctrinated to identify personally with the well-being of the state. Because that state no longer exists, an entire generation -- Hensel calls them "grandchildren of the Third Reich," "East-West hermaphrodites" and "sons and daughters of history's losers" -- is now forced to reexamine its very identity. Hensel struggles with the big-e Existential dread of freedom and learns to appreciate the many responsibilities that go along with it -- which is why I hope this book will find a permanent home in our high school social studies classes.

Andrew Ervin, a writer and critic in Champaign, Ill., recently completed his first novel. His short story "Op. Posth." will appear this month in the Prague Literary Review.

From Booklist…

A bestseller in Germany under the title Zonenkinder, Hensel's memoir is one of the first from her generation to examine the cultural effects of communism's fall in East Germany. When the Berlin Wall came down, Hensel was only 13 years old, and her high-school class was the first to follow a West German curriculum. Hensel writes refreshingly unaffected personal anecdotes about growing up behind the iron curtain and, postcommunism, about how she and her young adult peers strove to assimilate in the West--losing accents and clothing styles--anything that would betray which side of the wall they grew up on. With candor, deep insight, and occasional bursts of acid wit, Hensel describes the bewildering divides between older generations of East Germans and her own. And in deeply moving observations, she shows how the universal ache of leaving childhood behind was, for her, even more profoundly disorienting because an entire culture, not just a childhood, had been lost. A fascinating, highly readable memoir that should interest a wide audience. Gillian Engberg

Publisher's Weekly, October 25, 2004

"intriguing."

East Bay Express, October 27, 2004
"Hensel looks back at those lost symbols of the GDR with an almost perverse nostalgia."

Don't mention the wall
By Susan Wyndham
November 29, 2003

First it was life after the war; now it's life after the fall. Germans have turned to foreign novels rather than the stories of their own experience.

Thomas Brussig delivered his first novel to a publisher in East Berlin on November 9, 1989, a few hours before the Berlin Wall came down. "When the novel was published in 1991, it failed," he says. "No one was interested in books by German writers, certainly not books by young German writers, and least of all young East German writers."

By the time his second novel came out, in 1995, Germany was a new country. Heroes Like Us was a satire about an East German youth who brought down the wall with his penis. It was a massive success. "For a writer, it's a wonderful situation to have a past and a present and a strong barrier between them," says Brussig, who, at 37, is almost an elder of Germany's new generation of authors.

Jana Hensel, 27, is riding the crest of the wave Brussig helped begin. She derides Heroes Like Us as "too early to be serious about what really happened". But, like him, she began writing because "there was a gap in German literature that has to be filled about how young people feel about what is happening".

Her controversial bestseller, Zonenkinder, records how reunification shocked East German children such as Hensel, who was 13 when the wall fell. "Our world changed from one day to the next," she says.

As I travelled around Germany recently, publishers, agents, journalists and writers repeated the names of new literary stars, such as Brussig and Hensel, like a mantra. Judith Hermann's Summer House, Later, a collection of stories about young people adrift in the new Germany, has sold 500,000 in 32 languages. Ingo Schulze's surreal, literary stories set in Russia, 33 Moments of Happiness, and his novel, Simple Stories, have established him as a serious talent.

Wladimir Kaminer, a Russian immigrant, made emigre life cool in Russian Disco. Florian Illies examined the privileged thirty somethings of the West in Generation Golf. Zsusza Bank, the daughter of Hungarian refugees, won six major book prizes last year for her novel about the 1956 uprising in Hungary. The list continues: Julia Franck, Marcel Beyer, Christian Kracht, Jenny Erpenbeck and others.

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Everyone hopes the children of reunification can rejuvenate German literature and give it international sex appeal. But no one sounds convinced. "The youth boom was like artificial fireworks," says a publisher, Christian Doring.

A literary editor, Sigrid Loffler, says: "We've been expecting the big Berlin novel for 14 years but it didn't come."

On top of that, East Germans do not buy the literature of the West and the book market has followed the German economy into a deep hole.

This self-deprecating gloom comes as a surprise. Germany has a rich literary tradition built over centuries by writers such as Goethe, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka and Gunter Grass. The publishing industry ranges from the vast international empires of Bertelsmann (owner of Random House Australia) and Georg von Holtzbrinck (owner of Pan Macmillan Australia) to proudly independent houses.

In a country of 83 million, about 80,000 new books are published each year (more than in the US, where the population is 3 times bigger) and 70 per cent of the world's book deals are done in the annual frenzy of the Frankfurt Book Fair.

But since the 1970s, even Germans have considered German books boring - intellectual, dense, introspective, self-censored, obsessed with the past. "The Holocaust made German literature very heavy and hard to sell at home and overseas for 30 years," says Jorg Bong, editorial director of S. Fischer Verlag.

That might help explain why Germans have turned to the US, Britain and, to a smaller extent, Australia for the books they want to read. More than anywhere else in Europe, German bestseller lists look like ours. After two tours, Jonathan Franzen is a superstar, with sales of The Corrections hitting 300,000. Germans are the third-biggest consumers of Harry Potter books after the US and Britain.

Arnulf Conradi, the cosmopolitan publisher of Berlin Verlag, partly explains Germany's international outlook like this: "We still feel the effect of the Nazi time. After that, the window was thrown open and there was enormous interest in American and English drama and books. Now we are fighting a new national constriction. One voice says, 'We want German', but we've been through that once and we don't want to go through it again."

Loffler, a long-time critic, is now editor of the new, glossy Literaturen magazine. Trying to break down the paralysing distinction between high literature and entertainment, she has run cover stories on the American stars Franzen, David Foster Wallace, Jeffrey Eugenides and others, as well as Kafka, and one on forbidden books including works by Celine and J.K. Rowling.

Loffler says that in politics and literature, "Europe is at a standstill and looking back. Grandchildren are writing about what happened to their grandparents, using diaries and

reminiscences. They're relaxed, not personally involved like the generation of '68, but they're interested. The Holocaust is the negative founding myth of the new, unified Europe. We have to discuss the horrible stories of the 20th century."

The Holocaust hasn't disappeared as a subject, of course, but the attitude has changed. "German authors are the children of the generation that was really involved. They write about it as history; it's not a problem for them," says Gunter Berg, a Frankfurt publisher.

At a reading he gave from his novel about Josef Goebbels's sound recordist, The Karnau Tapes, 28-year-old Marcel Beyer was told by a German listener that he should not write about Nazism because he was too young. "But he was born in 1944, so we were on the same side," says Beyer.

His new book, Spies, is about young people trying to learn the truth about what their grandparents did during the war. "I have very young parents born after World War II, the '68ers, and they accused their parents of not talking about what went on under National Socialism. To fill the silence, they spoke and spoke and had all the answers but I don't know if they ever asked a question. When I visit my grandmother now, she tells me stories my parents don't know."

Beyer moved recently from Cologne to Dresden, in the old East to live with his girlfriend. He says: "For people in western Germany, the East is not on the map. I have friends in Cologne who would never cross the Rhine."

Thomas Brussig, for all his success, says: "I am an East German writer, not a real German writer. Reunification will be completed when I am a German writer."
This story was found at:

http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/11/28/1069825978712.html